Griffith ap Llewelyn (c. 1325–c. 1399)

Origin and Family

Born c. 1325. Died c. 1399.

Father: Llewelyn ap Cynric (c. 1300–c. 1343)
Mother: Nest ferch Gruffudd ap Adda
Spouse: Efa ferch Madoc ap Ellis (c. 1330–)

Children[1,2]:

1. Einion ap Griffith (c. 1360–c. 1397)
2. Angharad

From Rodney Horace Yale[1]: “He was of Cors-y-Gedol, and Farmer of the office of Sheriff of Merioneth, 46 Edward III [1372]; Sheriff 15 Richard II [1392]; Woodwarden of the Commote of Estimaner at some period between 7 July 1382 and 12 Oct 1385; died probably between 29 Sept 20 Richard II [1397] and the same day 1 Henry IV [1399]. Griffith ap Llewelyn married Efa, daughter of Madoc ap Ellis, of Crynlarth, in the County, sister and co-heiress of Llewelyn ap Madoc, Bishop of St Asaph 1357-75, derived from Owain Brogyntyn, Lord of Edeirnion. By this lady he had a son and successor, Einion ap Griffith.”

From *The History of Princes*[2] we learn that “Llewelyn ap Cynric married Nest, daughter and heiress of Gryffydd ap Adda of Dol Goch, and hereby had Ynys y Maengwyn, and large possessions besides in Ystymmaner and Aududwy. By Nest he had a son named Gryffydd, the first of the name, who enjoyed all his father's and great part of his mother's estate. He married Eva, daughter and heiress of Madog ab Elisau, a baron of Edeirnion, and a descendant from Owyn Brogyntyn, thereby enlarging his possessions. By her he had one son, named Eignion. to inherit his estates; and a daughter called Angharad, who married Davydd ap Gronw of Flintshire.”

The statements above illustrate one of the primary challenges with genealogy research of Welsh ancestry. Notice that nearly all the names have multiple spelling choices – was our ancestor Griffith or Gryffydd? Did he marry Efa or Eva? Was her father Madog ap Ellis or Madog ap Elisau? Furthermore, since surnames were not used, many people over the generations shared the same name. For example, in Griffith’s time, there were at least two contemporary Welshmen named Madog ap Ellis who had daughters named Eva.

Occupation and Property

Griffith was Farmer of the office of Sheriff of Merioneth. This position had nothing to do with farming: “They were usually men of high rank and great power in the realm, having one or more counties committed to them by the king at his pleasure. To them the king usually committed (together with the counties) his castles and manors lying within their bailiwick. They provided the castles with ammunition and other necessaries, and they stocked and improved his manors; in short, the sheriff was the king's farmer, or bailiff, and the collector of all his rents and revenues within his district. His duty was then, as it still is, to do the justice of his county, and to keep the public peace, of which he is within it the principal conservator, in aid of which he has the power of raising the posse comitatus; and as keeper of the king's peace he is, both by common law and by his commission, during his office, the first man in the county, and superior in rank to any nobleman therein. As to his judicial capacity, he hears and determines all causes, not exceeding

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forty shillings value, in his own court, called the county court, of which more has been mentioned before, and he has also a judicial power in several other civil cases. In his ministerial capacity, he executes writs and processes, proclaims statutes, returns juries, and makes return of writs for electing knights of the shire, etc."[3]

The highest position that a Welshman could hope to obtain was Sheriff. The Welsh term is rhaglaw, which translates to "governor", but it was often recorded in Latin as Vice Comes – meaning viscount or overlord. A bailiff or farmer of the office of Sheriff was considered "nominally subordinate to that of Sheriff, but executively of greater importance after 1282."[3] "Sometimes, the same person held both offices [Sheriff and Bailiff] or combined them with other offices, such as keeper of the forest (Woodwarden)."[3]

These offices were very lucrative to the holders – so much so that they were required to pay large annual sums each year to retain their position. "The woodward received apparently little more than 4 pence for every proven vert offense, but offers of 9 or 10 pounds were made in the fourteenth century in Aududwy [Merioneth], more than twice what was offered for the Sheriff of the same commote. Quite wealthy men were eager to lay their hands on the office, a fact which points to its profitability on one hand and to the supreme importance at the time of timber and woodland on the other."[3]

Griffith ap Llewelyn was therefore one of the most wealthy and powerful men in Merioneth. It had a large bond population at the time, meaning that many of the inhabitants were tenant farmers and were not free. As a Landowner, Griffith could benefit from their labor, and would have had the authority to remove them from his estate, or trade them to other landowners without their consent. However, Cors-y-Gedol was mainly pasture land, so it's difficult to know how many tenant farmers resided there. In *The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll 1292-3,* an entry directly pertains to Cors-y-Gedol: "Good pasture land was valued as highly as arable in the lordship of Denbigh in 1334. Even in coastal townships – at least in Merioneth – common pastures were reserved for winter use only. The boundaries of pasture land were carefully drawn. The importance of cattle cannot be underestimated. It was the prime source of wealth, the main prop of the economy."[3]

The Plagues

Griffith lived during the time of the black death plagues that devastated England and Wales. There were two varieties of the plague – pneumonic plagues spread through breathing while the bubonic plague spread through the fleas of the black rat. Symptoms included fever, vomiting, and bleeding. Victims usually died within a few days.

"Between 1347 and 1350, the Black Death killed about a third of the inhabitants of the Old World – twenty-five million people in Europe alone – and it struck again and again, especially in 1361 and 1369."[6] Pastoral communities such as Merioneth were less impacted than other areas of Wales and England. Still, an estimated 25% of the population in Wales died from the plagues of the fourteenth century. "In Merioneth, diseases among animals, which were particularly severe in 1315, 1348, and 1363, would have had more impact [than the plagues]. Assuming that the Welsh economy was in decline long before 1349, it is likely that the population of Wales was falling even before the coming of the plague. The country may well have had at least three hundred thousand inhabitants in 1300; it is doubtful whether it had as many as two hundred thousand in 1400."[4]

Griffith ap Llewelyn built a hospital named "Hospital of St. Mary the Virgin in Aududwy Merionethshire" in the parish of Llanaber, most likely in response to the plagues.[5]

The Venerable Archdeacon Thomas (FSA), in an entry in his "Papal Letters", recorded "a license granted to Griffith ap Llewelyn and his heirs to have masses, etc. celebrated in the Oratory of the

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‘Poor Hospital of St Mary the Virgin’ in the Diocese of Bangor”[7]. The entry locates the hospital between the estuary of Artro and Barmouth in an area “difficult to access.”[5,6]

The exact location remains a mystery, but it has been suggested that an old building that was part of the church at Llanbedr is the best candidate. “its dimensions and ground plan, as also its position of inaccessibility and isolation, and the character of its masonry being in agreement with that of the period of the erection of Griffith's Hospital, are favorable factors in support of its possible identification as the site.”[5]

The Church at Llanbedr

End of Life

Griffith ap Llewelyn died probably between 29 Sept 20 Richard II [1397] and the same day 1 Henry IV [1399], around the age of 74.[1]

Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: Ap_Llewelyn-49
FamilySearch ID: GH91-N61

Further Reading:
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5. Archaeologia Cambrensis Journal (6th Series), Vol. 8 (1908), Archaeological Notes & Queries, In *Papal Letters*, Vol. IV, p. 363

6. Barmouth Town Council Online Early Beginnings

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